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Thousands Protest U.S. Policy in Central America

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WASHINGTON, April 25 — Tens of thousands of demonstrators, heavily represented by churches and organized labor, marched through the streets of Washington today to protest American policy in Central America.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, an unannounced candidate for President, spoke to the crowd from the steps of the Capitol, saying that President Reagan and his Administration were responsible for "scandal in the Middle East, sabotage in Central America and an unholy alliance with South Africa."

Some prominent labor leaders, including Lane Kirkland, president of the A.F.L.-C.I.O., had tried to persuade unions to boycott the protest rally and march. But the event drew substantial support from labor unions, with possibly a third of the marchers bearing union placards or insignia.

Labor Leaders in Conflict

Twenty-four labor leaders were listed among the steering committee for the rally, called "The National Mobilization for Justice and Peace in Central America and Southern Africa."

Among them were presidents of some of the nation's biggest unions, including the United Automobile Workers, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the Communications Workers of America and the National Education Association.

Despite the participation of some of its most substantial member unions, the A.F.L.-C.I.O. had maintained that some groups backing the demonstration supported Communist elements in Central America.

The peaceful march today was a prelude to planned civil disobedience on Monday morning at Central Intelligence Agency headquarters in Langley, Va.

Reagan Called 'Desperate'

Protestors, including Daniel Ellsberg, Amy Carter and Abbie Hoffman, have said they planned to block traffic and invite arrest to protest covert C.I.A. activities in Central America and elsewhere.

Mr. Ellsberg, who attended today's rally and spoke to protesters, said that about "five to six hundred people, including myself, plan to get arrested."

Mr. Ellsberg, who has been prominent in liberal political circles since, he said, he made public the secret Pentagon Papers in the Vietnam War, characterized Mr. Reagan as "desperate"

and predicted that the President would be tempted to divert attention from the Iran arms deals and subsequent diversion of funds to the Nicaraguan rebels by waging war in Central America. Mr. Reagan was at Camp David, Md., today, where he delivered his weekly radio address.

"We are determined to tell him that he will have to arrest a lot of Americans to carry out those actions," Mr. Ellsberg said.

Estimates of number of protesters were difficult because demonstrators gathered in the morning at the Ellipse

behind the White House, then marched to the Capitol, leaving many still at the Ellipse and others still in the streets as the Capitol rally began in early afternoon. Organizers said the march drew 100,000 participants, while the United States Capitol Police estimated the turnout at 75,000 and the National Park Police put the figure at 35,000.

The steering committee formed to sponsor the march, an umbrella group of 35 church, labor and peace groups, listed as its objectives the "support of peace and freedom" in Central America and South Africa, an end to Ameri-

can aid to anti-government Contra armed forces in Nicaragua and prohibitions against "U.S. government and corporate support" for the South African Government's policy of racial separation.

The boycott recommended by Mr. Kirkland and some other labor leaders stemmed from the membership in the coalition of groups that Mr. Kirkland said go beyond opposition to the Reagan Administration's policy of intervention in Central America by "embracing the Sandinista regime" in Nicaragua and by giving "open support to the Marxist-Leninist guerrillas in El Salvador."

Among the groups named in a 16-page call to boycott the march distributed by the International Union of Bricklayers were the Committee in Solidarity With the People of El Salvador, the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala, the Inter-Religious Task Force on Central America, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy and the National Council of Churches.

However, criticism of the demonstration from the more conservative quarters of the labor movement was generally discounted by other protest leaders today.

Kenneth T. Blaylock, president of American Federation of Government Employees, estimated that as many as 45,000 union members had marched today and said: "There a difference of opinion, obviously, within organized labor about the problems of Central America. But that doesn't bother me. We are right. Labor was split in 1963 on civil rights. It was split later over the Vietnam war. We were right then and we are right now."

In a speech that brought loud applause, Ed Asner, the motion picture and television actor and former president of the Screen Actors Guild, said, "It is hard to believe the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s rhetoric about free speech abroad in the face their abysmal disregard for free speech at home."

The marchers pushed off from the soggy, rain-soaked turf of the Ellipse in wind gusting to 20 miles an hour. The temperature was 47 degrees.

Vietnam war peace symbol.

Many of the younger demonstrators said they were the sons and daughters of civil rights and anti-war demonstrators of earlier decades. John Ekman, a teenager who came from Saratoga Springs, N.Y., with his father, a former Vietnam-era demonstrator now a Presbyterian minister, said "I wanted to see what it is like."